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ABSTRACT

Despite huge investments in general education in most developing countries such as Nigeria, education of the handicapped has hitherto been left in the hands of voluntary organizations, owing to a general negative attitude toward disability in communities characterized by mass illiteracy. Current special education needs in developing countries reflect similar needs in Europe and America in the 19th Century, and result from minimal involvement on the part of the government in the welfare of the handicapped. Results of a survey of special education needs in Nigeria reaffirm the need for a concerted effort on the part of special education professionals to evolve model comprehensive special education programs for the country. (Author/SBH)

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PRIORITY NEEDS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES - THE CASE OF NIGERIA

A paper presented at the First World Congress on Future Special Education. University of Stirling, Scotland
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by

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Although many countries in Africa spend as much as 40% of their annual income on education alone despite such other national needs as agricultural development and increased food production, road development programmes, improved health services, development of natural resources and industries, urban development schemes, rural electrification and water supply projects, education of the handicapped in most of these countries subsists on mere crumbs that fall from the national educational table. Among factors contributing to the general apathy and neglect of the handicapped in emergent countries of Africa are superstitious beliefs which regard disability as a curse invoked by the gods, who must be appeased in order to work off the evil karma. A few nations who consider themselves enlightened enough to allow educational interventions in the interest of the handicapped, relegate the responsibility to voluntary agencies. In a few cases some religious sects even constitute major barriers to education and rehabilitation of the handicapped because of their belief that rehabilitation of the disabled will rob them of the opportunity to fulfil the religious requirements of alms-giving to destitute beggars - usually disabled individuals.

The traditional denial of the handicapped person's right to an education is exemplified in Nigeria where, until a few years ago, a country acclaimed the largest nation in Black Africa, with a population of over 70 million, had fewer than 2000 handicapped children of all categories, in less than 30 educational facilities that belonged primarily to voluntary agencies. These agencies could boast of a total of less than 50 trained teachers of the handicapped. Fortunately, since that time, the Federal

Military Government of Nigeria has come to the rescue, and Special Education is presently being established on a solid foundation.

Special Education needs in developing countries such as Nigeria recapitulate similar needs in the civilized countries of Europe and America a couple of decades ago. Governments of many developing nations still perceive their belated involvement in education of the handicapped as a kind of contribution of surplus funds to charity. The handicapped person's right to an education is still considered a Utopian dream in many developing countries who argue that they must first provide for the able-bodied who are believed to be more productive than the disabled.

Many such countries in Africa are hardly aware of the shining example of Nigeria where education of the handicapped was decreed free at all levels in 1976, and where presently, plans are under-way to introduce Special Education courses into all teacher education programmes.

Many developing nations including even those anxious to make up for the past neglect of their handicapped citizens, manifest pathetic inability to estimate accurately the number of disabled persons they must provide for. And yet, they are reluctant to embark on studies of incidence of handicaps, or to provide funds to voluntary agencies interested in such demographic studies. Instead of facing up to the challenge school boards and ministries of education in these developing countries belabour themselves to convince their people and the rest of the world that they are so fortunate as to have only a few handicapped members, when in fact, the estimated numbers are far below what one might expect from a single town in the locality. An education official in one of the states in my country recently wrote to give me the "hot news" that the state counted

all disabled persons and found that there were only 236 handicapped children of school age! Then he added, as an after-thought: "Can your University tell us when to bring these children so that you can teach them how to read and write and be useful to themselves?"

Although needs of Special Education in developing countries such as Nigeria encompass needs of all children able or disabled everywhere, some priority needs which are basic to the survival of Special Education both as a service delivery system and as a discipline, include: (1) periodic identification of children with handicapping conditions through a well-organized screening and testing service which should be part of the public school programme, undertaken in conjunction with health authorities. (2) Legislative provisions or enactments by governments, making education and medical care of handicapped children free at all levels from birth to adulthood. (3) Provision of a full spectrum of programmes and services so that each exceptional child can benefit from the programme that is best suited to his needs and ability. (4) Budgeting for recurrent expenses that include not only educational services and administrative costs, but also transportation, welfare services, research and adequate remuneration for all Special Education personnel. (5) Increased training opportunities for all Special Education personnel including: teachers, researchers, psychologists, audiologists, physical therapists, vocational counsellors, house supervisors and administrators (6) change of public attitude towards the handicapped - from negativity and suspicion to positive understanding and social inclusiveness (7) research in all areas of Special Education; including, psychological effects of each kind of handicap, medical aspects, sociological adjustments, vocational needs, demographic studies, and recreational needs of the handicapped.

As indicated at the beginning of this paper, Special Education in Nigeria is presently receiving the full support and encouragement of the Federal Nigerian Government by way of annual grants to state governments for education of the handicapped, subventions to voluntary organizations providing for the handicapped, grants to universities establishing programmes for training teachers of the handicapped, establishment of a National Advanced Teachers College in Special Education and employment of qualified handicapped persons, especially in the public sector.

As a pioneer institution of higher education in Nigeria, the University of Ibadan has a full-fledged department of Special Education which since its inception has produced more than 60 teachers who are now spearheading the establishment of special schools and programmes in their home states. A sister institution, the University of Jos, has also recently introduced Special Education courses into its curricula. Kaduna Polytechnic, another institution in one of the northern states of Nigeria has also recently established a "Department of Special Services" which offers "tailored-to-need" inservice courses in Special Education and Rehabilitation, for professional staff working in related fields, such as social-welfare, psychology and health education. Other institutions are well poised to follow suit.

The rapid growth of Special Education in this Africa's most populous nation highlighted the need to ascertain the special education needs of the country. Consequently, a survey was undertaken in 1976. Questionnaires (later followed with interviews) were sent to 100 respondents representing teachers of the handicapped, principals of some regular schools, deans of education in selected universities

and other Special Education personnel. A total of 87 respondents returned usable responses. These included 13 head-teachers (or principals) of Special Education programmes, 14 heads of public institutions associated with Special Education, 20 Special Education teachers and 4 regular classroom teachers. A brief summary of five most important questions asked, and results obtained, is given below:

Item I: How important is it that Special Education in Nigeria should include adequate provisions for these categories of the handicapped:

Percentage

	Most Important	Average Importance	Not Important
The Blind	82.76	1.5	0
The Partially-seeing	50.00	12.79	0
The Deaf	75.86	6.90	0.0
The Hard-of-hearing	47.62	14.29	0.0
The Educable Mentally-retarded.	65.12	11.63	1.16
The Trainable Mentally-retarded	41.86	19.77	5.81
The Brain-injured	40.70	20.93	3.49
Emotionally-disturbed children	44.19	16.28	2.32
Physically-handicapped children	70.93	3.49	1.16
Children with speech problems	38.37	13.95	1.16
Home or hospital-bound children	39.53	23.26	4.65
Gifted Children	57.14	14.29	11.90
Learning disabled children	38.37	23.26	3.49
Multiply handicapped children	48.84	24.42	0.0

These data seem to indicate that areas of the highest priority are the blind, the deaf, the educable mentally retarded and the physically handicapped. Many people seem convinced that the partially-sighted, the hard-of-hearing and gifted children could be effectively educated in regular schools. The concept of learning disability as an area in Special Education is still basically new in Nigeria and will take time to gain general acceptability.

Item II: What should be the national emphasis on Special Education?

Percentage

	Most Important	Average Importance	Not Important
1. Integration of the handicapped into regular schools.	39.51	22.22	12.35
2. Creation of special classes in regular schools	39.76	22.89	3.61
3. Establishment of special schools.	62.50	23.75	0.0

Many of the respondents, for various reasons, including dearth of trained special teachers, lack of special equipment, and psychological isolation of the handicapped in regular schools, feel that it is important to establish special schools for disabled children at this time, until necessary provisions can be made for those who are less seriously handicapped within the regular school setting.

Item III: At this initial stage of development of Special Education in Nigeria, what kind of programme should receive the greatest emphasis in university teacher education?

Precentage

	Most Important	Average Importance	Not Important
1. One-year certificate in Special Education.	57.47	4.60	3.45
2. Three-year B.Ed. degree in Special Education.	68.96	3.45	1.15
3. One-year post-graduate diploma in Special Education.	54.02	8.05	5.75
4. Higher degrees (M.Ed., Ph.D.) in Special Education.	56.32	9.20	8.05

Most respondents believe that three-year degree programmes should be accorded the highest priority, in view of the fact that presently, Nigeria has no secondary schools for any of the categories of the handicapped, blind or deaf aspirants to secondary education are left to sink or swim in competitive secondary schools for normal children, with few or no special compensatory services.

Item IV: Rate the following courses as common core experiences in Special Education which should be made compulsory for all Special Education students:

Percent

	Most Important	Average Importance	Not Important
Psychology of Exceptional Children	59.30	6.98	3.49
Behaviour Modification and Guidance	47.67	12.79	0

Percent

	Most Important	Average Importance	Not Important
Human Growth and Development	44.19	6.98	2.33
Psycho-educational Diagnosis	54.65	9.30	0
Communication Skills	51.72	11.49	0
Health Education	45.98	12.64	3.45
Psychology of Teaching Special Subjects	66.28	5.81	1.16
Teaching the Multiply-handicapped	37.21	16.28	3.49
Planning Individualized Instruction	53.49	8.14	2.33

These responses show that the major concern of teachers and professionals in Special Education in Nigeria is that teachers of handicapped children should be very knowledgeable in diagnostic procedures which will enhance early intervention measures. Having acquired such knowledge, they should then concentrate fully on understanding the handicapped children, training them in compensatory skills and devising innovative methods of effectively mediating instruction to them. In other words, Special Education must concentrate on those things that make it "Special".

Item V: How important would you consider the following types of experience for undergraduate student teachers in Special Education?

Percent

	Most Important	Average Importance	Not Important
Counselling with parents of the handicapped.	63.53	8.24	0
Research Methods in Special Education.	44.71	16.47	1.18
Administration of Special Education	48.81	10.71	1.19
Clinical Audiometry and Speech Therapy	54.76	10.71	0
Interpreting medical/ psychological reports	45.78	10.84	1.21
Observation of various special programmes.	58.82	11.76	0
Internship experience	57.14	13.10	0
Participation in workshops and seminars in Special Education	63.53	7.06	1.18

Again, the data show clearly that the overriding need is to provide help for parents, presumably to enable them to cope with the trauma and problems associated with "the handicapped child in the family". The emphasis on the widest possible exposure of the trainee to experiences that will enhance his competence as a teacher is also vindicated.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that the results of this study reaffirm the need for a concerted effort on the part of Special Education professionals in Nigeria (working in cooperation with their colleagues in other countries) to evolve model comprehensive Special Education programmes for the country, and hopefully, for other developing nations in Africa and elsewhere who would like to benefit from the Nigerian experience. We are determined to meet the challenge.